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ABSTRACT

Drinking problems among college faculty are discussed, and selective information is presented about alcohol abuse, employee assistance programs, adulthood stages, and futuristic changes in U.S. society. The idea that work obsession and alcoholism can be linked for university professors who have a high need for achievement is discussed. Enabling conditions in the work place that contribute to the onset of drinking problems for academics include: job security and tenure, informal or no supervision, being able to arrange teaching time around a drinking schedule, and the loneliness of researching and writing for publication and the use of alcohol for stimulation. The value of an effective employee assistance program is that many affected employees can be detected between 5 and 10 years before any of the more obvious symptoms of alcoholism are visible. Employee assistance programs provide a range of services related to legal, financial, family, marital, career change, health, and job stress problems besides intervention and educational activities. The use of alcohol in three stages of adulthood is considered. Pressures facing the professoriate include consulting, conferences, keeping up in one's field, and the rewards of greater income and status. (SW)

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ALCOHOL IMPAIRED UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS

A PERSPECTIVE

Joseph P. Caliguri

Anyone familiar with the history of alcoholism could agree that it is a constant reminder about the enigma of human nature. Why do people want to blot out reality? The case of the university professoriate with this problem takes on special interest here. Higher education professors will characteristically be stable, but more place bound, and aging as we view the next decade. In this context, selective information about alcohol abuse, employee assistance programs, stages of adulthood, and futuristic changes in American society will be presented. Conceptually, the attributes of self control as they affect personal and professional lives will provide an underlying thread to the contextual features noted above. The central idea of this paper is that work obsession and alcoholism can and do become steady partners for academics with high achievement need.

Alcohol Abuse

During the last quarter century, the National Council on Alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous primarily have raised American consciousness about alcoholism as a disease which can affect anyone. Yet, the stigma of alcoholics as people with inferior qualities persists in a society geared to the image of winners and losers and the preferred assumption that adults should be rational and able to cope with the contingencies and pains of life successfully. Psychologists call this phenomenon --psychological hardiness. For university professors as well as those in other status professions, the stigma may be noticeably devastating to

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self esteem. One recent report on the impaired professor lists the following enabling conditions which may put academics at greater risk of developing drinking problems or chronic alcoholism. These enabling conditions are: 1) informal supervision, if any; 2) Job security - tenure; 3) Control over time -- arranging teaching time around a drinking schedule; 4) Denial of the problem; 5) The loneliness of researching and writing for publication and the use of alcohol for stimulation can go hand in hand. Even hyping one's self up by drinking before teaching has been more than a minor occurrence with academics.

Alcohol problems take time to develop (progressive disease concept) and as professors age the problem may emerge, more so with tenured professors, making detection and treatment more difficult especially when professors may use collaborators and students to assist them with their work.

Adding to recent efforts to document the problem of impaired professors is a study by Thoreson as chief psychologist in a new alcohol treatment facility for professional-executives (academics, physicians, psychologists, attorneys, etc.). His findings indicate:

1. An intense denial and rationalization system supported by highly developed verbal/analytical skills occurs during treatment.

2. Preoccupation with the stigma of alcoholism rather than identifying one's self as an alcoholic and preparing one's self for a new life of sobriety.

3. It is more effective for the psychologist to finesse the professional-executive denial system in a one to one relationship by leading the patient to self discovery through lectures, readings, counseling sessions, etc., in an empathic approach rather than

confrontation except when done by peers in informal contact, group therapy, or in family employee assistance program conferences. If the treatment program is to work, the alcoholic has to surrender -- he/she no longer uses the denial system and shares emotional reactions emerging from inner thoughts and feelings (anxiety, fears, anger, resentment, spiritual bankruptcy).

4. Work obsession, high performances and rigorous denial of alcoholism make documentation of decline of job performance very difficult when viewed over time. The kinds of information we are talking about gives credibility to the notion that professors can be vulnerable to the seduction of alcohol. At the same time, another source of credibility about this notion is the rise of employee assistance programs to deal with university employees needs and problems.

Employee Assistance Programs

Employee assistance programs have grown from very few to about 150 in higher education in this decade. It is not a missionary program as much as it is an intervention for institutions interested in sustaining productive employees and cutting down costs of absenteeism, sick and medical leave, and disciplinary problems. The real value of an effective employee assistance program lies in the fact that many affected employees can be detected somewhere between five and ten years before any of the more obvious symptoms are visible. It is also to be noted that employee assistance programs provide a range of services related to legal, financial, family, marital, career change, health, and job stress problems besides intervention and educational activities.

These employee assistance programs when given high support by university authorities, guarantee of confidentiality, and discrete locations are making impact on university populations. For alcohol abuse, an anchor statistic from employees assistance progam information shows that 7 to 8% of university employees are an "at risk or potential to lose control population" which is similar to business and industry data. This statistic omits hidden data about spouses, friends, relatives, and children whose lives are affected by an alcoholic or who become alcoholics themselves. In a number of cases on record at treatment centers, impaired university professors are children of alcoholics. AA groups may well flourish in university settings as a linkage to employee assistance programs over time.

At this point, since alcoholism is a progressive disease it is significant to move to a wider lens view by including a psycho-socio interface which can add to understandings about alcoholism.

The Psychology of Control in People

In a psychological sense we all experience primary feelings of control or loss of control over life activities from time to time. Feelings of control occur when individuals shape existing physical, social, or behavorial realities to fit their perceptions, goals, or wishes. On the other hand, feelings of secondary control occur when individuals attempt to align themselves with existing realities, leaving them unchanged but exerting control over the impact of these realities on themselves.

As an example, reformed alcoholics achieve understanding and acceptance of certain perceived realities (e.g.) "I am an alcoholic," as

well as primary control over other realities (e.g.) "refusing to take that first drink." The serenity prayer adopted by AA is an example of a blend of primary and secondary control. It is a plea for "the serenity to accept things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." In terms of progressive stages of alcoholism, professors may move from social drinking to problem drinking, and finally to chronic alcoholism as they struggle with perceived primary and secondary controls or even periods of perceived helplessness, sometimes called the identity crisis -- who am I?, Where am I going?, etc. This struggling occurs as pressures and demands of the work place and or life activities related to home and family disturb a basic feeling of equilibrium.

Erik Erickson's work on stages of adulthood provides another reference point to probe in seeking to understand influences on alcoholism.

Stages of Adulthood

The focus is only on the last three stages of Erickson's seven stages of adulthood for the purpose of this paper.

Young adulthood--late adolescence to early middle age. After attaining a sense of personal identity and engagement in productive work in early adolescence, one enters young adulthood or late adolescence to early middle age and strives to attain a sense of intimacy with friends or marriage which if not attained results in a sense of isolation--no one to share or care for feelings from which alcohol can be used as a compensatory activity.

During middle age one may actively concern himself or herself with the welfare of young people and making the world a better place for them to live and to work or may fall into a state of self absorption in which personal needs and comforts are of predominant concern. If one has a social drinking habit and increases a "loner's role," alcohol can become a psuedo companion.

In the last stage, when an individual's major efforts are nearing completion and when there is time for reflection, a sense of integrity may emerge as an individual looks back on his/her life with satisfaction, or a sense of despair about what might have been may emerge if an individual looks back on life as a series of misused opportunities and directions. If it's despair one may increase one's vulnerability to such negative seductions as alcohol. I am not advancing the perception that people move through these stages in a predictable sense. Situations, conditions, external factors make accuracy of these abstracted stages open to individualistic differences and influences of external realities.

Though beyond the scope of this paper, it should be acknowledged that studies on aging are contributing information about elderly people who suffer from loneliness as they become isolated from jobs, families, loss of spouses, friends, and so on. In this instance, abstainers or social drinkers may seek the solace of alcohol to blot out their existing reality.

Futuristic Outlook

Among some notable changes in the next 25 years after the invention of the microchip in 1970 and the ushering in of the information electronic age are: Universities with multiple electronic channels may

increase the caliber of managing by consensus with collaborative networks of people using access to computerized data. In this concept, over emphasis on individualism and independence may be lessened as an enabling condition for alcohol problems.

Health services performed by a computerized generic expert health system will counsel on personal health needs, diagnose ailments, and prescribe treatment for people who access themselves to it in their homes. The electronic doctor may benefit individuals and families who otherwise would avoid educational information and traditional alcohol problem interventions for a variety of reasons.

Education will utilize computerized modules in which teachers will coordinate the use of programs for a large number of students and assist special students. How this educational change will affect educators in the context of alochol problems or alcoholism is a moot question at this point. Nevertheless, improving our ability to adapt to the electronic age will be the major challenge ahead.

Summary

The selective information on the subject of university professors who may become impaired by alcohol problems or alcoholism has been presented to illuminate and extend an understanding of this special problem. As university professors strive to live their lives attempting to influence existing realities or accomodating to existing realities through the adulthood stages to cope with pressures and demands in their personal and professional careers, employee assistance programs can assume greater significance in university settings. If we also assume that alcohol abuse, divorce, disappearance of family support systems,

stress, emotional and mental disorders, and individualism remain as commonalities of American life, professional counseling will become more firmly entrenched. If we further assume that more sophisticated employee assistance programs will be able to detect university professors with the potential for high risk for alcoholism prior to the advent of the progressive disease stages, then a meritable form of primary prevention may occur. At the same time, allocation of resources for intervention and rehabilitation programs can be reduced. Alcohol education programs for all university personnel can become a standard utilizing designs based on adult learning characteristics, computer assisted instruction and applications to real world activities.

Specifically, in a society with a deepening urge for expert knowledge, pressures for consulting, government service, conferences will add to an already heavy work-load on the professoriate. In addition, scholars will find it difficult to keep up in their field as the knowledge base grows constantly. In a world that honors winning and affluent life styles, more professors can expose themselves to the seducing rewards of greater income and status, and vulnerabilities such as alcoholism may emerge through the prism of work obsession. Universities will need to be more clearer about the functions that they perform uniquely well and the conditions required to carry them out if we are to take more serious concern about the hazards involved with the professoriate in the future.

Summary

During the last quarter century, the National Council on Alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous have raised American consciousness about alcoholism as a progressive disease which can affect anyone. Yet, the stigma of alcoholics as people with inferior qualities persists in a society geared to the image of winners and losers, and the preferred assumption that adults should be rational and able to cope with the contingencies and pains of life successfully. Psychologists call this phenomenon -- psychological hardiness. For university professors as well as those in other status professions, the stigma may be noticeably devastating to one's self esteem. As the central idea of this paper it is being acknowledged that work obsession and alcoholism can and do become steady partners for academics with high achievement needs.

To enlarge understandings about this special problem, selective information on work place enabling conditions that contribute to the onset of drinking problems is presented first. As university professors strive to live their lives attempting to influence existing realities or accommodating to existing realities through the adulthood stages to cope with pressures and demands in the personal and professional situations, employee assistance programs can assume greater significance in university settings than heretofore. If we also assume that alcohol abuse, divorce, disappearance of family support systems, stress, emotional and mental disorders, and individualism remain as commonalities of American life, professional counseling will become more family entrenched. If we further assume that more sophisticated employee

assistance programs will be able to detect university professors with the potential for high risk for alcoholism prior to the advent of the progressive disease stages, then a meritable form of primary prevention may occur.

At the same time, allocation of resources for intervention and rehabilitation programs can be reduced. Alcohol education programs for all university personnel can become a standard utilizing designs based on adult learning characteristics, computer assisted instruction, and applications to real world activities.

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Generally, in the society of the future, our ability to adapt will remain crucial in terms of exerting self control over human needs and aspirations as these vital elements are affected by the electronic age. We should devote more time to the development of peoples' collaborating and consensus management skills in professional life situations with

appropriate recognition or rewards. This kind of life development behavior can counter point to some degree the over emphasis on individual work obsession commonly occurring in today's world of work.

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